FRENCH COMIC DRAMA FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

GEOFFREY BRERETON

GEOFFREY BRERETON ON FRENCH TRAGIC AND COMIC DRAMA

ROUTLEDGE

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PREFACE

This book is a companion to my *French Tragic Drama in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, but covering a longer period. The extension to the eighteenth century was made possible on grounds of space and desirable because of the nature of the material by the relative poverty of French comedy before 1630, requiring only an outline for the general reader and ordinary student, with a few pointers for intending specialists, whereas tragedy in the same period was a much more important genre. By the eighteenth century true tragedy had faded out and its attempted developments and variations demand a separate study, preferably linking or comparing it with the *drame*. Comedy continued to flourish through several decades of that century, reaching a late climax in Beaumarchais. Although a decline had begun in the 1730s, until then at least there were organic connections with earlier comedy. To sever these at the end of the Grand Siècle would be an act of amputation. In part prolonging a tradition, in part renewing or transforming it, the new comedies were vigorous and full of character in themselves.

Wherever one looks in this field of drama, Molière's pre-eminence is apparent. No attempt at reassessment could shake his position as France's greatest comic dramatist – and, one might as well say, the world's. Nor can his influence on later comedy be doubted. But, as with Corneille and Racine in tragedy, concentration on Molière has obscured somewhat lesser writers whose work presents features which are not in him. Disregarding the very different and fully recognized comic vein of Marivaux and the early comedies of Pierre Corneille which have been reinstated by scholarship if not on the

stage,[1] one can point to Scarron and later to Dancourt and his generation as outstanding examples of unmerited neglect. All these particularly, with about a dozen others, make up the substance of this selective survey.

Individuality in drama is less common than in other kinds of writing. The author of an unusual novel or poem has more chance of having it published and eventually appreciated. The playwright in most periods must comply with the conditions of the theatre, its preconceptions and its production and acting techniques. Though the strongly original dramatist always breaks through in the end, it is against this background of theatrical practice which is only moderately flexible. I have therefore sketched it in wherever it seemed significant. Nevertheless the main stress falls on the major dramatists and their work (which can always be read but in many cases never seen acted), and from comparisons between them a coherent picture should emerge of the nature and development of the comedy of the time. This is the principal advantage of studying them in juxtaposition rather than in isolation. What it gives is not indeed a pattern but an interrelated series.

The guiding principle, as in my *French Tragic Drama*, is again 'descriptive'. This is sometimes thought to preclude 'criticism', though it is difficult to understand why. The criticism accompanies the description or is inherent in it. Admittedly it rarely results in one of those general theories which seem so illuminating but after a time, measured in no more than decades, have only the period charm of gaslight and can no longer be regarded as fully switched-on. If, as is sometimes the case, they happen to be based on an insufficient number of examples, they can be positively misleading.

Meanwhile the original works remain, inviting various interpretations, but permanently there for reappraisal. The theory that any work of art, particularly drama, exists only in virtue of the spectator's or reader's response to it, is at first sight very attractive. This two-way act of creation through participation does give life to works which might otherwise seem dead. But the theory contains a serious flaw. Supposing the artist were a genuis and the spectator an imbecile, or of course vice-versa, what a monster they would conceive between them. To describe the original works as objectively and accurately as possible

[1] A table of performances at the Comédie Française from 1680 to 1973 shows: *Le Menteur*, 835; *L'Illusion comique*, 50 (33 in 1931–40); all the other comedies, nil. (Sylvie Chevalley in *Europe*, special number, April–May 1974.)

while indicating their tone, context and the main problems they raise seems the best service the ordinary critic can render both them and the ordinary reader.

In this book, as in its predecessor, I have often drawn on H. C. Lancaster's *History of Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* and *Sunset*. That monumental work runs, with its extensions to eighteenth-century tragedy, to thirteen volumes and well over 5000 pages. It describes and comments on every available play from 1610 to 1715 and every tragedy from then until 1792. The product of a lifetime's dedicated scholarship, it is never likely to be superseded as a storehouse of factual information; only very occasionally does it require corrections on minor points. But it also contains critical opinions and summings-up. One may agree or disagree with them and they tend to get lost in the factual mass, but a careful reading of only a few score pages shows that Lancaster was aware of nearly all the points which interpretative critics have developed, even if he did not do so himself. A typical scholar of his day, he was perhaps over-preoccupied with 'sources' – important certainly in dramatic literature but not always of great explanatory value.

The foundation of the present book is the direct reading or re-consideration of two or three hundred plays. In recent years excellent collective editions of several of the major dramatists and of selected plays by others have appeared. They have made more readily available essential information on textual and allied matters and I have often utilized them with gratitude. Where they are lacking or not comprehensive enough, further textual and historical research has been necessary (Rotrou and Scarron are cases in point). Critical interpretations of the more general kind have been taken into account whenever possible, if sometimes only to be rejected. The author has retained the right to exercise his own judgement.

Comedy has a more obvious and immediate relationship with the life of its time than tragedy. It reflects the ethos and *mores* of the social scene very closely. That provides its main material, and the social significance of the plays reviewed has been pointed out constantly, as both interesting and highly relevant. Aesthetic and dramatic criteria distinguish the good comedy from the weak comedy, but the theme or subject is nearly always, in the widest sense of the word, 'manners', and without a basis in them the most beautifully constructed play would have a hollow centre.

Although these comedies have been placed in their historical context, modern parallels suggest themselves so forcibly that it was impossible to avoid drawing them. This body of comedy was not only lively and amusing in its own day, but much of it still seems to be alive now. It can be studied, yet at the same time enjoyed with less specialized knowledge than tragedy demands. There should be no contradiction here. A first-year French student recently reported back from her university that she was greatly enjoying the books set in her course and felt rather guilty about it. 'Enjoyment' did not seem to go with 'work'. If this attitude ever became general in the academic study of literature, equating 'rigorousness' (with its unfortunate associations with *rigor mortis*) with boredom, it would be a sad day and a prediction of the end of this particular road.

FRENCH COMEDY BEFORE 1630

The comic and comedy, meanings and types – French Renaissance comedy: the Pléiade group and their models in Latin and Italian literary comedy – later French comedy to 1630 – the commedia dell'arte *– its type-characters – native French farce and the seventeenth-century* farceurs *– forerunners of television – romantic comedy and pastoral*

Comedy is a broad term and, if extended to take in 'the comic', it becomes even broader. Far from being confined to drama it occurs throughout literature, in the epic, the novel, the poem and also, without benefit of art, in our diverse reactions to the ordinary incidents of life. 'A funny thing happened the other day, I (nearly) ran over my husband/boss/dog.' In its connection with theories of laughter the Comic Sense has been exhaustively analysed. It is unnecessary to go over this ground again beyond saying that, superficially at least, laughter is usually provoked by incongruity or surprise, by an unexpected departure from the normal. But what is thought 'funny' in this sense and what 'normal' may vary from individual to individual and also according to the time, place and circumstances. Some bystanders found the Crucifixion funny, others not. The response depends ultimately on the reigning psychological and social or communal assumptions and is therefore changeable. Even those simple jokes which appear basic because of their constant recurrence in known literature have not always amused everyone.

The comic is not necessarily even laughable, though it is hard to refuse it the element of surprise, either pleasant or unpleasant. In the second case the way may be open for 'bitter comedy', 'cruel comedy',

'black comedy', and so on. The comedy of the absurd, which seems based on the obvious, can be ranged in the familiar category of the surprisingly obvious and loaded with irony. These general theories, however, do not affect the description of most of the plays considered in this book, though they must enter into the analysis of some of them at a deeper level which will be indicated where relevant.

Our terms of reference are already laid down on general lines and our first concern is to characterize the successive phases of a plainly demarcated genre conceived as such by its authors and performed in the appropriate theatrical convention by actors specialized in representing it. Although they may have been mistaken, these knew what they meant and what they were aiming to offer to the public as stage comedy. Within the genre there were several variations and changes of emphasis which should emerge from this study. In its relationship to other genres – tragicomedy, *drame bourgeois*, and even tragedy – there was some interpenetration which also will be indicated where it seems significant. But on the whole French comedy over this long period can be surveyed as an independent genre, reflecting in its different facets qualities which are primarily its own and in which the external associations are of lesser importance. Even when, as in the comedy of intrigue, there is an obvious debt to Italian or Spanish originals which were not laughable, the French comic sense has usually taken over and adapted the material to its own purposes. A plot in itself is a mere convenience. It is the effects drawn from it which determine the nature of the play.

A distinction should no doubt be made between comedy (i.e. 'high comedy') and farce. These are the two opposite ends of the scale and it is not difficult to isolate the grosser forms of farce which have no ambition to be other than that. But farcical features are so persistent in every type of comedy that it is impossible to ignore them there or to detach them. How, for example, could one approach Molière without an awareness of his farces and near-farces and their overspill into his most serious plays? There are the peasants and Sganarelle in *Dom Juan* and why did he put Orgon under the table in *Tartuffe*?[1] Only *Le Misanthrope* is completely purged of the farcical.

[1] Because it was theatrically effective and convenient, it might be replied. Orgon must be able to get out easily in order to hide behind his wife. But Molière could certainly have devised some different overhearing-scene less reminiscent of the husband–wife–lover business of the traditional farce. Other

These two concrete examples only begin to suggest the importance of farce as both a stage influence and a habit of mind in the comedy of the whole period covered in this book.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, comedy certainly attempted to break free from farce and to acquire a higher status. For convenience we may call it literary comedy, though the term is descriptively inadequate. It was, however, still a poor relation to the more highly esteemed genre of tragedy, which claimed a direct ancestry from Seneca and the Greeks, and this inferior standing partly explains why so few comedies were printed (for the eighty years 1550–1630, about fifty, of which the majority are translations). There was no theatrical tradition and none grew up to compete seriously with the native farce and the work of the Italian comedians which will be described later. Though of considerable interest to specialists, French comedy in this period hardly constituted a live drama and produced no plays of outstanding quality.

The earliest attempt to create a new literary comedy must be credited to the Pléiade group of poet-dramatists. The same writers who had launched French tragedy in the 1550s, beginning with Jodelle's *Cléopâtre* (1552–3), produced in that and the following decade a handful of comedies which can be listed briefly:

Étienne Jodelle: *L'Eugène* (1552?) and a lost comedy, *La Rencontre* (1552–3), which seems to have been acted together with *Cléopâtre* at the first memorable performance of that tragedy before the king.

Jean de La Taille: *Le Négromant* (*c.* 1562) and *Les Corrivaux* (1562).

Jacques Grévin: *La Trésorière* (1558) and *Les Ébahis* (1561).

Rémy Belleau: *La Reconnue* (*c.* 1563).

Jean-Antoine de Baïf: *L'Eunuque* (1565) and *Le Brave* (1567).

These plays were performed by students in their colleges and occasionally in aristocratic houses or at Court. Though mainly

comic dramatists put their characters in clothes-closets or adjoining rooms. The characters of tragedy, of course, hid behind the arras or its equivalent.

written in the octosyllabic verse of the old farce (Jean de La Taille's were in prose), and containing similar passages of coarse humour, they were consciously intended as a departure from popular drama and designed to appeal to a more educated public. Their models and sources already point to the main influences that ran through French comedy for the rest of the sixteenth century.

Jodelle and his contemporaries could draw directly on the classic works of Latin comedy, which in its turn had derived from the Greek New Comedy.[1] The plays of Terence were familiar to every schoolboy as classroom texts. Those of Plautus, bawdier and linguistically more colloquial and exuberant, were less prized as examples of pure Latinity, but nevertheless widely read. The comedies of Belleau and de Baïf listed above were little more than translations or close adaptations of the Latin dramatists, whose influence is also perceptible in some of the others.

The more modern Italian influence already appeared in Grévin's *Les Ébahis* and in La Taille's two comedies (*Le Négromant* was a translation from Ariosto; *Les Corrivaux* had a plot taken from Boccaccio). It was soon to become very powerful in its two forms.

The so-called 'learned comedy' (*commedia erudita*) had flourished in Italy since the early years of the century. Based essentially on the Latin comedy, whose virtues as live theatre the Italian humanists had rediscovered, it produced both translations of the originals and adaptations showing varying degrees of inventiveness and transposing them to the contemporary Italian scene. In general, these became comedies of love intrigue with complicated plots and a strong element of bawdiness. Thus French writers could either borrow straight from Terence and Plautus or from the sometimes richer Italian versions. The results were predictably similar.[2]

[1] Principally Menander, whose original work was almost unknown to the sixteenth century. Some of his lost plays have been rediscovered, in whole or in part, in the twentieth century. The Greek Old Comedy of Aristophanes was available to sixteenth-century scholars, but was hardly utilized.

[2] In drama, and comedy in particular, one can go back and back for the themes, plots and characters. The question the critic will ask is less: 'Where did he get it from?' than: 'What did he make of it?' In 166 B.C. Terence, defending himself against a charge of plagiarism, wrote: '*The Flatterer* is a play of Menander's. One of the characters is a parasite, and there is a braggart captain. Our playwright does not deny that he has transposed these characters to his play from the Greek original . . . But if he is not allowed to introduce the same characters, how can it be more legitimate to introduce a servant on the run or a good old gentlewoman

For the remainder of the sixteenth century one can add to the plays of the Pléiade group the more or less original comedies of *Les Néapolitaines* (1584) by François d'Amboise, *Les Contents* (1584) by Odet de Turnèbe, *Les Écoliers* (1589) by François Perrin, and *Les Déguisés* (1594) by Jean Godard. (The dates are of publication and some of these plays must have been acted earlier.) The most prolific comic dramatist was Pierre de Larivey (*c.* 1540–1619), an Italian by birth who seems to have spent most or all of his life in France. He published six comedies in 1579 and three more as late as 1611. All were translations from Italian playwrights but were given French settings and character-names and written in lively colloquial French prose.

Apart from Larivey's last three comedies, probably written much earlier, very little survives from the early seventeenth century. Pierre Troterel published two highly vulgar 'comédies facétieuses', *Les Corrivaux* (1612) and *Gillette* (1620), but though of five-act length these were extended farces in their manner and material. Alexandre Hardy, most of whose extant plays are tragedies and tragicomedies, is known to have written one lost comedy in 1625, while the sole noteworthy comedy of the time, *Les Ramonneurs* (*c.* 1624), has also been attributed to him.

In most of the Pléiade comedies the social background implied was that of an urban (Parisian) middle class, amoral and motivated almost exclusively by money and sex. The characters were merchants, their unfaithful wives, lawyers, the occasional priest (as in Jodelle's *L'Eugène*), the minor nobleman and the soldier. But these characters and their actions did not constitute a true social comedy. In that respect they projected the world of the older farce, going back to the fifteenth century and earlier, in spite of a more sophisticated treatment. Moreover the plays were too few and their impact too limited for it

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or unprincipled courtesans or a greedy parasite or a braggart soldier or a suppositious child or an old gentleman tricked by a servant, or love or hate or jealousy? In fact nothing is said that has not been said before . . .' (Prologue to *The Eunuch*, Loeb translation.)

It will be noticed that Terence's list includes the basic elements of the majority of the French comedies described in this book. The principal exceptions are in P. Corneille and Marivaux.

to be possible to see them as a reflection of contemporary society. It was visibly very partial and founded more on convention than on observation.

The same can be said of the later sixteenth-century comedies. The down-to-earth middle-class background is again implied, though certain characters such as the braggart soldier, the student and the servants are more in evidence. Disguises and recognitions become more frequent and complicated as the Italian influence grows. But here also the small number of plays does not permit a valid generalization about their social basis. If not socially rootless they bring nothing new to a picture of the *mœurs* of the time, and this is truer still of the early seventeenth century.

The second Italian influence, more immediate than the *commedia erudita*, was that of the *commedia dell'arte*, which brings us back to the indefinite borderline between comedy and farce. There seem to have been several visits of Italian players to France – and French writers also visited Italy – before the almost permanent establishment of Italian companies in Paris which began in the 1570s with a royal invitation to the celebrated Gelosi. This was in the reigns of Charles IX and Henri III, whose mother was Catherine de Medici. It continued, with a few breaks, for about two hundred years.

The *commedia dell'arte* had sprung up in Italy towards the middle of the sixteenth century. Much of the basic material – plots, situations and characters – derived from the *commedia erudita* which the same players also performed at times, and through that once again from the Latins, but they transformed it for delighted audiences by their stage technique. This was physically lively and even acrobatic in what became the manner of the modern circus clown. Relying on mime, they improvised what dialogue was necessary in a jargon compounded of Italian, Spanish, French and mock-Latin, comic in itself and quite adequate to convey the meaning of their crude and simple situations to foreign audiences. Their performances were unscripted, or largely so. It seems unlikely that verbal scripts were used until the last quarter of the seventeenth century and none was published before 1691. By then French authors were writing for the Italians and scenes from their plays, in French, were published by Évariste Gherardi, the then

Harlequin of the troupe. Twenty-seven years later Luigi Riccoboni, a contemporary of Marivaux, published French and Italian versions of eight plays in his *Nouveau Théâtre Italien* (1718). Collections of outline scenarios appeared, however, much earlier, such as those of Flaminio Scala, who was in Paris with the Gelosi in 1577, and of Domenico Biancolelli (1640–88). The humour typical of the *commedia dell'arte* can be illustrated by an extract from Biancolelli's scenario for *Il convitato di pietra*, a Don Juan play a few years earlier than Molière's:

> In the shipwreck scene I am in the water in my shirt with ten or twelve bladders. I rise up and down as though I were swimming and I come out on the stage saying, 'No more water, no more water, but as much wine as you like.' My master recovers from his faint and while he is talking to the girl I do the trick [*lazzi*] of bursting one of the bladders by falling on my bum. It makes a noise and I say that is the cannon I am firing to celebrate our safe arrival.

The *commedia dell'arte* players usually acted in masks or made up their faces with powder and paint to create fixed character-types. In one or other of these their greatest actors would specialize throughout their careers, introducing their own modifications and becoming identified in the public mind with the character itself. Their strongest influence on French comedy was to be exerted through these types or 'masks'. The principal were these:

The Braggart Soldier or Captain (*Capitan, Capitano*), fantastically boastful about his impossible military exploits and also a Great Lover – irresistible, he believes, to women. Cowardly at heart, he is always deceived and deflated in the end. He was a development of Plautus' *Miles gloriosus*. Resenting the Spanish occupation of parts of Italy, the sixteenth-century Italians usually made him a Spaniard. Among his various names were Capitano Spavento di Valle Inferno, Terremoto, Matamoros, Rodomonte, Coccodrillo, Sangre y Fuego; in Germany, Horribilifibrax. He became naturalized in French comedy as *le fanfaron*.

Arlecchino (Harlequin), at first the Second Zanni or comic, reminiscent of the Parasite of Latin comedy, in which he had followed the Captain for what he could get out of him, generally a huge meal, since he is obsessively greedy for food. He often mocks and double-crosses his patron. The type was developed in a subtler direction in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Brighella, the First Zanni, the cunning servant, intriguing with great resource on his own or his master's behalf. He is related to such seventeenth-century French masks as Scapin, Turlupin, Sganarelle.

Pantalone, the First Old Man, with the comic features ascribed to his age. He was usually a rich and avaricious merchant, crafty yet easily taken in, wheezy but given to sudden leaps in the air which left him exhausted. He still fancied his chances with women and sometimes also had a scolding wife. As an authoritarian father he was in conflict with his children, attempting to thwart their love affairs or force undesirable marriages on them.

The Doctor, the Second Old Man, with various names such as Doctor Baloardo and Doctor Balanzone. Initially a comic-professor-type, perhaps invented by the students of Bologna, later he was more usually a lawyer or a physician. He remained pedantic and loquacious, given to long speeches full of mangled Greek and Latin phrases. Like Pantalone he had amorous inclinations but was always frustrated.

Pulcinella or Cetrulo was originally a ridiculous buffoon, also elderly, related to the traditional court jester. Developed by various Italian actors in the seventeenth century, be became, with his hunchback and his beaked nose, the Punch of the eighteenth-century puppet shows.

In contrast to these strongly caricatured types, the young characters were recognizably human and presented as attractively as possible, without masks or exaggerated make-up. As pairs of lovers they had various names. The quick-witted serving-maids with their ready tongues abetted them. These also played unmasked and were coquettishly attractive. At first called Zagne and later Servette, giving the French *soubrettes*, they generally paired with the Zanni or menservants of the Brighella line. Colombina, a name first assumed by the famous actress Catarina Biancolelli round the turn of the seventeenth century, paired, however, with the developed Harlequin to form the now established couple.

Such were the main types which the *commedia dell'arte* placed before the French public for the best part of two centuries. Far from being merely 'popular', its chief exponents enjoyed the esteem and friendship of kings and princes. An excellent amateur interpreter of the Doctor's part was Prospero Lambertini, who remained proud of the fact after he became Pope Benedict XIV in 1740. It was to this Pope that Voltaire dedicated his tragedy *Le Fanatisme ou Mahomet* and

received a warm letter of thanks in which Benedict gave his apostolic blessing to his 'dear son'.

Though much has been written on the subject, it is hardly possible to draw a clear line between the influence of the *commedia dell'arte* on the French theatre and that of Latin comedy and the *commedia erudita*. The only generalization to be made is that it was manifestly important and had a physical presence lacking in the other potential models. Its main weakness was the absence of idiosyncratic female masks: the Scolding Wife as a type-character, the Courtesan, the more novice Prostitute and the Procuress with her near-relation the Nurse.

Though all these, except the Wife, disappeared in the more squeamish drama of the seventeenth century,[1] they had persisted until about 1630 in Parisian farce and in more ambitious plays, such as Alexandre Hardy's tragicomedies. The native farce might be seen as an alternative to the *commedia dell'arte*, but it also sometimes borrowed from the Italians and here again a precise distinction is unrealistic. To find the French farce in a pure state one has to look back to pre-Renaissance times and one can indeed look a long way – to the Latin writings of obscene-minded monks, to the *jongleurs*, to the *fabliaux*, to the clowning episodes which enlivened the Mysteries, to a number of precedents not necessarily meant for acting which composed the great medieval tradition that Rabelais inherited. In the sixteenth century the farce, together with the *moralité* and the *sotie*, continued this popular vein of broad clowning and bawdy which needed no foreign examples to sustain it. The tradition survived vigorously in the provinces until at least the 1650s (as Scarron's *Roman comique* testifies), and in Paris itself during the first two or three decades of the Grand Siècle.

It was then that the three celebrated *farceurs*, with the stage-names of Gros-Guillaume, Gaultier Garguille and Turlupin, performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, giving place sometimes to Italian companies

[1] The Procuress reappears in modified form in the Frosine of Molière's *L'Avare*. She inaugurates a long line of *femmes d'intrigue*, who are semi-respectable in that they do not keep brothels or tout for them but arrange chiefly marriages, together with other activities such as letting lodgings or money-lending. One can perceive a descendant of the Prostitute in the more mercenary of the coquettes of late seventeenth-century comedy, but these have risen above the humble professionals by their social standing and their methods.

and to shortlived attempts to present more serious drama by the actor-manager Valleran le Conte. In this period they offered the only kind of native comedy that the Parisian public knew, or apparently wanted. Their acts consisted of broadly humorous monologues and brightly smutty songs delivered solo, and they also had their feeds or combined together to present sketches inspired by topical and local events. A wife could not cheat her husband or a husband beat his wife without the risk of seeing the drama re-enacted amid laughter at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. They had much in common with the modern comics of television and the music-hall, each building up a personality which, once established, was a certain draw in itself. Outside this theatre other *farceurs* performed in the streets, notably Tabarin on his outdoor trestle stage on the Pont Neuf. He was a distant forerunner of commercial television since, continuing an earlier practice, he performed to attract customers to the shop next door. The object was to draw crowds who could then be sold quack medicines by a *charlatan* or *opérateur*, or be persuaded to undergo rudimentary surgery or dentistry. The performance itself had no open connection with the goods on sale.[1]

The acts of the Hôtel de Bourgogne *farceurs* were not printed, no doubt because, like those of the Italians, they were largely improvised. But they can be reconstructed with fair plausibility on the model of the numerous other farces which were printed[2] and with the help of other publications, the *Œuvres* of Tabarin,[3] the *Chansons* of Gaultier Garguille,[4] and the humorous monologues of the earlier *farceur* Bruscambille.[5]

So in the eighty years following 1550 nearly all the elements of later comedy appeared, but were not seriously or consistently developed.

[1] There have never been more than four ways in which actors, musicians and other exponents of the non-plastic arts, who have nothing material to sell, can earn a living. They can charge admission fees, they can send round the hat (but this is notoriously chancy), they can draw subsidies from the State or other patrons, or they can rely on the kind of side-benefits that Tabarin enjoyed.

[2] Two collections appeared in the seventeenth century, one in 1612 and the other in 1619 (*Recueil Trepperel*, ed. E. Droz and H. Lewicka, 1935–61).

[3] Tabarin, *Œuvres* (1609), ed. G. Aventin, 2 vols (Paris, 1858).

[4] G. Garguille, *Chansons* (1631), ed. E. Fournier (Paris, 1858).

[5] Bruscambille, several publications, as *Facécieuses paradoxes et autres discours comiques* (1615), *Œuvres* (Rouen, 1629).

The four main streams, often intermingling, of Latin comedy, the *commedia erudita*, the *commedia dell'arte* and the farce flowed through this drama which lacked all the first requirements of success – an adequate theatre, a responsive and habituated public, and an outstanding author. The only type of play that was conspicuously absent was what in English terms is usually described as 'romantic comedy', the play concerned with lovers, with a complicated plot and a happy ending. It tends to be poetic and devoid of open cynicism.

In many such plays, whether they were Shakespearian or Spanish, there was no definable 'comic' element unless it was supplied by the Fool or *gracioso*, who was generally outside the main scheme of action and structurally dispensable. The germ of romantic comedy might be seen in some of the chaster love intrigues which stemmed particularly from the *commedia erudita*. In France, however, these were characteristic less of early comedy than of pastoral, which was classed and performed as a separate genre at the opposite pole to farce. Dramatic pastoral, again following the Italians, had appeared at the end of the sixteenth century and was to receive a new charge of energy from Honoré d'Urfé's pastoral novel *L'Astrée* (1607–27) and to enjoy a vogue which lasted well into the 1630s. After 1640 it virtually disappeared, but not without leaving perceptible marks on tragicomedy and comedy itself.

One of Rotrou's experiments in romantic comedy is considered in Chapter 3 below.